

Snow

Jacque Clinton

From her house of solitude, Mary glimpses the world through narrow windows and shyly opened doors. Seven years have elapsed since she last crossed the threshold when suddenly she slipped from life. Nowadays the outer world is framed by the boundaries of her domain as seasons change and years pass by. Diligently, she chronicles this progression. In the pages of memory, she marks today as the beginning of winter filled with diamond fields and tumbling flakes. Its beauty incarnate—this world of sparkling, shimmering white—that exists beyond her reach.

Gazing out her window, Mary feels the separation as a wound that will not heal, as if somewhere along life's path, she was surgically removed from the world. Perhaps it began when Tim threw open the door and left her behind. Now she is divorced from nature and the seasons with visitation offered through a pane of glass. Peering through to observe the white speckled sky reminds Mary of the snow globe she owned as a child, but instead of holding the orb within her hands, the snow now fills the outer world, and she is trapped in a dome of emptiness. She wonders briefly if she is the spectacle with outsiders gazing in upon the void. But emptiness, in truth, is a subjective state—turn Mary's world upside down and she would fall through the air betwixt a flurry of possessions, covering the carpet in a blanket of material wealth. Still the nothingness would cling to the walls and ground.

To quell these thoughts, Mary positions herself upon the floor, just to imagine the feeling of being one with the snow, contributing to the blanket that hugs the earth. For one glorious moment her mind is not her own. She's settling in snowdrifts, carried by the wind, melting into an uncertain future that is at least shared. "Is this what it feels like to be part of a culture?" She spreads her arms across the ground, but the falling flakes cease and the feeling escapes.

Mary searches for a seed of hope within her mind; sadly, all that occurs is the acknowledgement that her house is adequately insulated from

the cold. The seed of consolation soon withers and is swallowed by the void. In response, Mary, too, curls inward willing her body to return to the womb. It seems reasonable to believe that a maternal feeling could be achieved in a room of plush furniture and comfort; however, it's a lost cause in a place that visually portrays the death of nurturing. In Mary's world, rickety tables, wooden chairs, and "modern" conveniences are scattered about like bits of debris. Only her TV appears to be well-cared for and used, though at the top of the set, its true age is revealed by antennae that stand as sentinels of a bygone era. Forever leaning in drunken attention, they're unaware that they've already lost the battle of time. Amongst these archaic entities, Mary stands as companion of history. "This is my culture," she realizes, with bitter thoughts forming like a proclamation to the world. "I am of the material tribe, awaiting the day when I will lose myself amongst the pile of emptiness...I'll be buried beneath the absence of dreams."

Mary's eyes may be critical, yet it's difficult to dispute that her tribe has seen better days. The paint is peeling from the walls as if seeking to escape the ruins, while in the kitchen a dripping faucet counts the minutes to old age, forming a puddle in the sink. Even the fountain of youth would stagnate behind her locks and doors. But something is alive, as fears course through veins, leaving quivering limbs behind. With every turn, Mary sees her reflection in the signs of deterioration, and she knows that somehow she must break out of this tomb.

The rate of change seemed to have gathered momentum over the course of Mary's life; it was subtle at first, then days, months, years slipped beyond her reach. Turn the clock back 5-10-20 years and there existed an age of innocence before the dawn of fear when Mary ran through the fields, willing her body to touch the horizon...*Muscles stretching, gaining speed, adjusting to thin air.* Then life presented obstacles that caused her to know the pain of falling.

She fell hard at the age of twenty-nine when Tim decided he'd had enough of working the land and conforming to familial obligations. He moved to Chicago where a cousin said he could offer a job with monotonous paperwork and a steady income. To be fair, he wasn't the only one who fled. During that period the town itself seemed to close up and decay with the loss of its working generation. Mary read in the paper that farming is

dead in this country, at least for those who try to live outside the shadow of monolithic corporations, so she fled from the change by wrapping herself in stillness and isolation with the hope that she would be contented with her life. Despite these efforts, her body retained the memory of running free. She feels it now—a yearning in every particle of her being—to dance in the snow, relishing the ephemeral beauty.

“Just go,” she imagines people saying, “open the door and leave.” Truthfully, if someone were to ask her what was standing in her way, her eyes would glaze and her tongue would fail to form a reply. Like the time her sister last phoned—it must have been five years ago—urging Mary to attend her niece’s birthday party. She of course declined, but the reasons could not be conveyed in a spoken language. Now her sister seems to have lost her number. It happens. Mary tells herself that their relationship was lost in translation, which she believes is quite often the cause of death in relationships.

“Enough.” Her shaking fingers navigate the buttons of her TV while the fuzzy screen gradually reveals moving images of faraway locations. Settling onto her worn couch, Mary prays to the cable gods for a mental break to take her from this scene as blue skies and pop music invade. On a good day, she can lose herself for hours to the news or even to infomercials if the hosts show a bit of charisma, but something has clicked inside Mary that no amount of TV will allow her to escape. She’s consumed by memories of snow falling through the sky.

With every gust of the wind, Mary hears the world beckoning in a sequence of taps against the glass barricade, the sound of life competing with the drone of the TV. Commercials exist to inform people of their needs. They offer the secret that “if only you had this it would all be okay,” yet Mary turns from the screen. Instead, she resumes her position as the portrait-woman in her frame, inviting people to gaze from afar. Passersby would note the skill of the painter, for her eyes seem to follow wherever one goes. Is it just an illusion, or is she nearing the glass? So close to the window, perhaps the paint will bleed through...

She remains in place, while a darkening sky shows the passage of time. Steady as the thermometer descends. The chill that emanates from the glass reminds her of ice-skating on Mr. Johnston’s frozen pond at the age of fourteen... *Red scarf trailing in the breeze, the Johnston boys racing, Mary and her sister*

twirling, pretending not to know that the race is in their honor... Life was all around, present in the rapid heartbeat and flush of cheeks, every breath made visible in the chilly air. In those days her only fear was that chores would keep her from that winter paradise. "When did fears begin to rule my life?" Anger or fear? They're similarly manifested once established in the brain...
...but there is the possibility of emotional eviction for those willing to open the door.

Open it wide to change, to seasons, to winds carrying a breath of life. Because Mary has long prayed for a storm to rage and shatter the glass of her world. And now, overcome with restlessness, the storm is finally emerging from within. She's spent seven years angry at Tim, her sister, and everyone else who walked past her window without the burden of a million stones of fear weighing the body down. Now the wind is coming from a different direction—she is angry at herself. She is the one who locked the doors against life.

In the background, the TV is still blaring with Rachel Ray's perkiness completely alien to the moment. Her happiness is too much for Mary to take—seven years of pent up anger suddenly erupt in a scream. Mary rushes for the TV and with one great yank, the chord comes free sending Rachel Ray into TV oblivion. Filled with adrenaline, she heaves the TV through the air. The sound of shattering glass hits Mary's ears like music from heaven. Open your eyes to witness the change, as slipping now...

See her slipping away. Past the shards of her prison, the cold greets Mary as a kiss upon bare skin. Snowflakes are dancing, swirling around. She opens her mouth to taste the sparking freedom.